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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how the collaboration of several educational groups (the Illinois Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Illinois Association of Teacher Education, Commission for Quality Teacher Education in Illinois, Golden Apple Foundation, and Illinois Staff Development Council) has helped influence public policy. The group, which calls itself the Coalition for Induction Activities, hosted a statewide conference on best practices in teacher induction to encourage school districts to participate. Conference proceedings were published and disseminated, giving the group a voice. Another joint project was a conference entitled Collaboration, Cooperation, and Professional Development in which the groups emphasized their desire to share responsibility for continued professional development of teachers. Another collaboration involved ongoing efforts to address Alternative Routes to Certification legislation recently passed by the Illinois General Assembly. Six keys to the success of this collaboration were: (1) identifying common themes or goals, (2) stressing the equality of all participants, (3) ensuring clear communication between and within organizations, (4) taking small steps and addressing noncontroversial issues until trust was built, (5) choosing organizational representation carefully, and (6) spelling out all responsibilities for the groups, including financial risks. (SM)

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Influencing Public Policy through Collaborative Efforts

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Influencing Public Policy through Collaborative Efforts

I am pleased to have this opportunity to discuss some experiences with you here at the ATE Conference. My purpose in submitting this proposal was to allow me to share some ideas, not as the leader of any coalition or the head of any particular commission but as participant/observer in a major change process that has been ongoing in Illinois for the past several years. When I first attempted to put this proposal together, I thought of contacting everyone who had been involved. I quickly realized that the list would be almost endless -- I can generate at least 20 different key participants in the process just off the top of my head. So, please realize that I am not attempting to claim credit for all that has occurred. There were many, many others who also played prominent roles. I have decided not to even attempt to name them in this presentation out of fear of omitting someone. What I decided to do was to reflect upon the many occurrences and changes that have resulted from a series of collaborative efforts and to offer my thoughts here. This is a very different type of presentation for me. I have been accustomed to presenting lots of data and the implications based on the data, complete with overheads, charts, and tables. This drastic departure from the quantitative realm has me both excited and extraordinarily nervous. I hope that you will find it worthwhile. In this presentation I will provide some historical observations, narrate some of the experiences we have had that highlight the accomplishments of our collaborative efforts, pull out some points that we have all learned about collaboration and public policy, and finally allow for some sharing in this group. I have also been able to print my remarks, and I will be happy to provide you with a copy at the end of the session if you wish.

The genesis of many of the collaborative efforts in Illinois was frustration -- frustration on the parts of many groups of professionals who wished to have some

impact upon what was happening rather than simply being "done to." I assume that most of us have had similar experiences with policy pronouncements from state boards of education or higher education, whimsical legislation passed on behalf of some special interest groups, or seemingly data-free decisions reached by influential persons. In Illinois, this feeling of frustration seemed to be reaching a peak in the early part of this decade. A couple of examples should suffice. In response to some newspaper articles on teachers who had difficulty in writing notes home, our legislature had passed a sweeping rewrite of the general education requirements for teachers. The fact that all colleges and universities had significant general education requirements developed by competent faculty was not enough. Instead, teachers had to meet new and different requirements. As you can easily figure out, all of us in teacher education had to somehow learn to blend the state's requirements with the requirements of our respective institutions. Then, we had to shoulder the flack from parents and students about how impossible it was to earn a teaching degree in a 4-year period of time. Similarly, as we worked to increase our preclinical hours, rulings began to come down from our State Department of Education as to what could count and what could not. While no specific formulae were ever promulgated as rules, we began being cited in our reviews for failure to meet certain arbitrary percentages. Sometimes, we could even get different rulings on issues depending on the person to whom we spoke. Finally, additional course mandates seemed to be added in an unorganized fashion every year or so. The teacher education curriculum became almost totally prescribed and not necessarily well-planned. Colleges and universities, school districts, and teachers' organizations were left out of the policy development loop.

As groups of professionals, we got together within our own enclaves (e.g., IATE, IACTE) and complained about how no one in power ever seemed to listen to us. We

even ran some workshops on influence. Everyone had a nice time and vowed some action, but these good intentions never amounted to anything. Instead, we all went our separate ways with our separate interests and never got together. We began to realize how little impact we had when an unknown legislator told an unknown member that "Higher education will never have any impact on what happens in the legislature. You can't even agree among yourselves what the issues are."

An opportunity for collaboration presented itself in 1993 around the idea of the induction of teachers new to the profession. Teacher educators were concerned about this issue because we wanted to see our new graduates succeed; schools were concerned about the issue because they were increasingly hiring new graduates and, of course, wanted to see those graduates do well in the classroom, and the state cared about this issue because it was under pressure to ensure competence in all teachers. The research was well-known. Many teachers left the profession after only a few years, new teachers were typically assigned the worst classes under the worst conditions, and many new teachers struggled with the realities of moving from the status of a student to the status of a person in full charge of a group of very important people. A number of groups started exploring this concern from different vantages. How we all got together was probably due more to serendipity than to any planned effort. The planning came once several of us realized that the opportunity to push collaboration was knocking and that we needed to respond.

Within IATE, a special commission had been appointed by the president to explore anything and everything related to teacher education. The Commission for Quality Teacher Education in Illinois met several times and discussed a wide range of issues never coming to any consensus about what action should be taken. During the course of one of these discussions, an idea to talk with highly-qualified veteran teachers about what they did to get to the level of competence they were at was

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suggested. In Illinois, an organization that, among many other activities on behalf of education, recognizes outstanding teachers is the Golden Apple Foundation and the Golden Apple Academy. The Golden Apple Foundation was contacted, and a meeting was set. Three members from the Commission met with three members from the Golden Apple. My recollection of that meeting is that it was very tense at first. Each group felt suspicious of the other. The Golden Apple wondered if IATE was just another bunch of ivory-tower professors out to use the Golden Apple teachers to get another publication for the endless *vitae* we all seek, and IATE wondered if the Golden Apple representatives thought they knew everything about teacher education. Things were not going too well when the subject of teacher induction came up. IATE readily admitted that the teachers prepared by the university were only well-qualified beginners, and that significant assistance from school-based personnel was needed if these beginners were to succeed. The Golden Apple Academy had recently joined with Kappa Delta Pi in an effort to provide a summer session for new teachers. The meeting took a positive turn when IATE members were invited to come and view the summer session. We did, and a common concern began to unite us. One group had become three.

At the same time as the Commission was working, IACTE was also interested in the induction issue, primarily because of NCATE requirements to provide some follow-up and assistance to teacher education graduates. IACTE received some funding in conjunction with the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory to explore teacher induction in Illinois. A survey of Illinois school districts and key union personnel led to the publication of a document with specific recommendations. However, this one group was not having much of an impact. In addition to IACTE's work, the Illinois Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (IASCD) was also beginning to explore teacher induction. A member of IACTE who was also sitting on

the IASCD group exploring induction knew of my work with IATE. Also on the IASCD group was the president of the Illinois Staff Development Council (ISDC). We all got together one day for a meeting and agreed to form an *ad hoc* group called, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, the CIA (Coalition for Induction Activities). Three groups had now become six, and the time for policy influence was ripe.

I will comment a little later on the initial workings of the CIA and some of my observations about how we all finally really came together. First, I would like to highlight what the group finally accomplished. After initial struggles about what we hoped to accomplish, the group finally agreed to host a state-wide conference on best practices in teacher induction in an attempt to encourage all districts to begin trying to provide some activities. While in the midst of planning for this conference, one of our members shared that the Illinois State Board of Education was also discussing induction and was on the verge of initiating some new rules. This development threw us all into a panic, because no one knew exactly what was being proposed. I was selected to attend the Board's meeting the next day in an attempt to learn what was being proposed and to let the Board know that a number of professionals were working together to try to influence best practices. We wanted some to be allowed to provide input. I attended the open meeting of the Board. I was one of two observers, the other being a regular lobbyist from a special education group. When a Board member asked me who I was and why I was there, I responded. Since I was more than 50 miles from home, I guess I was then seen as an expert and was invited by the Board to sit on their "panel of experts" to provide input on teacher preparation issues. Serendipity strikes again. I attended Board meetings for over 2 years and was able to relay information in both directions. I also learned a few things. I learned how difficult it is to have real communication on the state level. I also learned how quickly and arbitrarily some decisions can be made. All in all though, I was very impressed with

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the dedication of the State Board members and struck by the sheer volume of the items they had to consider. But, I digress. Now, back to the accomplishments.

Conference plans progressed and all members of the CIA began to fulfill their responsibilities admirably. The conference went off without a hitch, and the group continued to meet until we were able to hash out a consensus position statement signed by all of the organizations. We were also able to publish the proceedings. Now, rather than a position statement held by just a few hundred individuals, we now represented about 10000 educators. Positions like that have some impact. We had an audience before the State Board of Education, and as the Illinois State Board of Education has continued to examine teacher induction, the recommendations of the CIA have become the foundation for new legislation.

Several other outcomes have occurred because of this initial coalition, and collaboration has become much more commonplace in Illinois. Because we were all able to work together once, groups and individuals now seem to be much more willing now than earlier in the decade to contact other groups and individuals and solicit cooperation. We have all learned that we are much stronger and influential when we are united than when we are divided or uncommunicative. One example of additional collaboration included a joint fall conference held in 1997 by the IASCD and the IATE. The theme of the conference, "Collaboration, Cooperation, and Professional Development" epitomized the groups' desires to share responsibilities for the continued professional development of teachers. Evaluations of the conference included such comments as "It was great to have higher education finally involved in a conference with school-based personnel," "I liked having the college students present. They added such vitality," and "It was nice to talk with school personnel at a fall conference rather than just other teacher educators." We were able to have past national presidents of the organizations provide keynote addresses. For ATE, Len

Kaplan did an admirable job. Another example of collaboration includes an on-going effort to address "Alternative Routes to Certification" legislation recently passed by the Illinois General Assembly. All of the groups mentioned and some others have some concerns about rules for this legislation, and the groups are now meeting to develop some common input. The State Board of Education now knows of all of the groups, and the groups' leaders maintain regular contact with State Board personnel. The State Board has responded well and now, whenever new rules are proposed, input from the groups is actively sought. This was a major change from the status quo of just a few years ago, and needless to say, we are all happy to provide our opinions. Finally, another group has heard about the success of the collaborative conference and has suggested another. This topic is somewhat more controversial -- inclusion. However, all groups want to see effective inclusion practices implemented, soo... another conference may be in the making. Negotiations and discussions are proceeding slowly but steadily.

I have spent a considerable amount of time documenting what has occurred in Illinois, in part because of the collaborative efforts of a number of dedicated individuals and groups. As I mentioned earlier, we have not been the only influence. Many others have also had an impact. Still, education groups have a pitiful history of influence, and we have begun to change that in Illinois. What I would like to do now is to offer some observations and some hints about building effective and working coalitions.

I had the opportunity to sit in on a number of the initial meetings of the groups, and all reminded me of similar meetings I had been in a few years earlier as my university was attempting to begin some professional development school agreements. To put it bluntly, no one trusted anyone else. Groups and individuals exhibited professional jealousies and a reluctance to share the "center stage" with some other, obviously inferior, groups. There were, of course, some conflicting ideas

about how we should proceed. Sometimes, accusations were made and tempers flared. But no one walked out, and somehow we all hung together. Why? I attribute the successes to the following, all of which I offer as hints to successful collaborative efforts.

One: Identify a common theme or goal upon which all can agree. I also suggest that this initial common theme/goal be one that does not generate a myriad of highly-divergent opinions. This identification of a common goal or theme is crucial for any collaboration to succeed. As our groups started their work, the theme of providing quality induction services to all Illinois teachers was stressed continually. Our goal of running a statewide conference to promote quality induction services addressed our theme directly. We agreed that, whatever our differences, we could all agree that this issue was important and that a conference would be worthwhile. Several of us who helped to instigate the collaboration were elated at the opportunity to take a topic that everyone agreed was important and that everyone had essentially similar ideas on how to address it. We purposefully seized this opportunity to begin collaborating with a vision toward future collaborations. Our hopes were that once people learned to work together, more controversial topics could be introduced and that other collaborations outside of our initial group would begin to take place. Several times during our initial meetings, whoever was leading the meeting had to discipline some of the members when things began to get out of hand. The statement was something like, "Remember why we're here. We need to provide assistance to our beginning teachers." Because of the dedication of the professionals who were participating in the collaboration, that was all that needed to be said. Without a common goal, though, meetings could have easily deteriorated.

Two: Stress the equality of **all** participants. It must be human nature, but it seems like all of us like to think that we are the greatest thing since sliced bread.

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When a number of highly-qualified and dedicated professionals get together from different realms, interesting interactions begin to occur. One or two people feel that they have the answers and we should all be grateful to them for monopolizing the discussion and sharing their wisdom. Others are somewhat indignant of these verbal individuals and choose to sit back, fold their arms and muse about how stupidity must be positively correlated with a need to talk. Others begin to look at the meeting as a waste of time and start grading papers or reading other important documents instead of participating. Everyone is suspicious of everyone else. The capable classroom teacher may look at the university professor as an out-of-touch bookworm from the ivory tower. The distinguished professor might view a classroom teacher as one who is incapable of understanding complex research and is mired "out there." The busy school administrator might wonder what all of this has to do with him/her and want to get to the point immediately. These suspicions and jealousies are very real and must be addressed before even beginning any collaborative effort. The purpose of collaboration is to bring disparate groups together with the realization that everyone has something of importance to add to the dialogue. Self-subjugation, in the form of a true willingness to give up our established positions and assume different roles is necessary to draw from everyone their unique views and ideas. The facilitator of the meeting must ensure that **everyone** participates equally and must consciously attempt to include all thoughts as decisions are reached. To help with this issue, we rotated facilitators among the groups until such a time as specific roles needed to be designated to achieve the final goal (e.g., facilities coordinator, program coordinator, keynote speakers, etc.). After several meetings, people began to see that the other individuals were indeed competent and could be trusted. Equality of participation became commonplace, and the facilitator's role diminished as all participants began encouraging ideas from everyone else. There were some whose egos would not

allow them to buy into this type of work easily. Eventually, they drifted out. My purely subjective observation was that the most competent individuals were the ones who most easily adapted to this style of equality. Those on the second or third tier of competence seemed to need to prove their competence by attempting to monopolize everything. They did not last.

Three: Ensure that clear communication takes place both between **and** within the organizations. We took great pains to ensure that all participants clearly understood what was being decided. When a decision was reached, the facilitator paused and repeated his/her interpretation of what was decided. Others in the group were asked to repeat their interpretations, and we did not move on until all had agreed on the wording of the decision and on the actions required to carry out the decision. At times, specific dates were set (e.g., "All organizations will have a set of peel-off mailing labels mailed to X by Y date."). Clear notes were taken and distributed to all the participants within two or three days. By taking these precautions, we were able to ensure that everyone knew what he/she needed to do and by when it needed to be accomplished. For the professionals in our group, follow-up on these clearly-specified responsibilities was not a problem. As competent individuals did good work, trust increased exponentially.

A second issue regarding clear communication was that we needed to ensure that the participating organizations knew what was occurring. Most of us who were participating were simply interested members of our respective organizations. None of us felt comfortable with speaking for our organizations without first gaining the approval of our governing boards. We realized this, and as such, we needed to plan for time to allow the representatives to go back to their organizations, discuss the issues, and come back together for final resolution. This realization that decisions will take time and the respect shown for each organization by allowing full organizational

input was critical. Our initial collaborative efforts began two years before the planned conference. Another major collaborative effort (IATE/IASCD joint 1997 fall conference) began 1 1/2 years early. We are currently involved in another major collaborative effort regarding rules and regulations for alternative routes to certification legislation that was passed recently in Illinois. Here, we have only one month to get our act together, and we are right in the middle of that concentrated effort. However, because of our past collaborations, I am optimistic that we will be able to pull off this short term effort successfully.

Four: Take small steps and try to address noncontroversial issues until trust is built. We were fortunate to have a groundswell of support building for a relatively noncontroversial issue just when many of us wanted to begin collaborative efforts. As we began planning, we only asked for commitments from meeting to meeting until such time came that we needed to move to action. Even then, we tried to address each task a step at a time, all the while keeping our eyes on the final goal. We felt that if we could assure success on a number of small, intermediate steps, success would come when larger projects were undertaken. Additionally, we all know that a series of small steps eventually leads to the accomplishment of a larger goal.

Five: Choose your organizational representatives carefully. We all know who the workers are and who have the mouths but no persistence. Do not choose your representatives based on perceived status. Instead, your group's representatives should be individuals who can be trusted to do what they promise, can communicate clearly, and who honestly value others' ideas. As you invite others to participate, spell out these desired qualities. Collaborative efforts can be sabotaged easily.

Six: Finally, clearly spell out all the responsibilities for the groups including the financial risks. I am not sure about your organizations, but most of the ones I belong to don't have an overabundance of funds. As we planned our conference, naturally most

of us were concerned about costs. We were able to secure commitments from two of our wealthier organizations to fund excess costs up to $1000 each. The rest had to be covered by conference fees. We all did as much as we could as frugally as possible, and we came in with a loss of only $300. Considering all that we were able to accomplish (a statewide conference, a consensus position statement, and a program proceedings booklet), most considered that loss a very small issue. The IATE/IASCD joint conference lost more money, but both organizations felt that it was worth the cost to continue the collaboration. However, I recommend that all of these risks be spelled out clearly before the collaboration begins and that all agree to share in the risks.

In conclusion, I hope that these brief remarks have helped to provide some ideas about collaborative efforts and how these efforts will eventually result in changes in public policy. As a bit of an aside, where I work our faculty and staff have been going through a series of training workshops on racial reconciliation. In these workshops our leaders have pointed out a number of different principles necessary if true harmony between races is to occur. I noticed that their points coincided almost directly with my observations on what was necessary to have a true professional reconciliation. The concept of addressing differences, whatever they may be, effectively appears to have some universal common denominators. I think we are on our way in Illinois. I am not so naive to think that nothing will ever be done in education in Illinois without our input. I am also not so naive to think that our tenuously-linked organizations will always be able to speak with the same voice on important issues. However, what I hope is the case is that now many Illinois educators see clearly the advantages of joint efforts, that they learned that they can actually enjoy working with others, and that they believe that others have good ideas that are worth hearing. I can state unequivocally that we are now having a much greater impact than we used to have just 5 years ago.

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